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SUBJECT: Somalia - President Sharif Begins PM Candidate Interview Process

REF: a) DJIBOUTI 105

CLASSIFIED BY: Bob Patterson, Counselor for Somalia Affairs; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a brief, February 11 meeting, on the heels of his successful visit to Mogadishu, transitional President Sheikh Sharif previewed what we believe to be the four finalists for prime minister. Sharif's list coincided with the list given us February 10 by Sharif Hassan (reftel). In addition to the four inside-track candidates, Sharif will interview seven others primarily, we believe, to convince other interest groups that they are receiving a fair hearing. At this juncture, it seems likely that Sharif will announce his prime minister nominee no earlier than the afternoon of February 12. In the February 11 meeting, we again lobbied for former UNPOS consultant Mohamed Abdirizak, but assured Sheikh Sharif that we could work enthusiastically with any of the four short-listed candidates. Sharif underscored his appreciation for our collaborative working relationship. End summary.

¶2. (C) On February 11, Ambassador Swan and the Somalia Unit Counselor met briefly with President Sheikh Sharif the day after his return from what has been described to us as a successful, four-day trip to Mogadishu. A relaxed, confident Sharif told us he accomplished everything he wanted with the visit. Sharif said the next challenge is the appointment of a prime minister and echoed Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia Central Committee Chairman Sharif Hassan (reftel) in suggesting to us that he had narrowed the list of candidates to four: former UNPOS consultant Mohamed Abdirizak, son of the former President Omar Abdirashid Sharmarke, Somalia's Nairobi Embassy Political Counselor Mohamed Osman "Edson," and Dubai-based businessman Said Abdullahi Mohamed. Perhaps in a gesture to the United States Sharif, after a pause, unexpectedly added a fifth candidate to the list, Amcit Abdulkareem Jama, but admitted that Jama had not traveled to Djibouti from the U.S. to lobby for the job. (For biographical information on Jama, see para 5.)

¶3. (C) Somalia Unit Counselor noted that the four finalists all seemed well-qualified, but briefly reviewed again the credentials of Mohamed Abdirizak, and concluded by expressing our willingness to work enthusiastically with whomever of the four candidates Sharif chose as prime minister. (Note: UN Special Representative Ould-Abdallah separately provided us with a complete list of the eleven candidates to be interviewed by Sheikh Sharif on February 11 - 12. It included candidates that Sheikh Sharif had in earlier meetings told us were not contenders. We believe that Sharif is conducting protocol interviews with them in order not to alienate the clan or interest groups backing their candidacies. In addition to the four short-listed candidates, they are: Ali Khalif Galaydh, Hassan Abshir Farah, Maslaw Mohamed Siyad, Ali Abdi Aware, Abdirizak Osman Jurile, Abdirashid Irro, and Nuradin Aden Diriye. According to the schedule, the last interview will end at noon, February 12.)

¶4. (C) Sheikh Sharif told us that the number of candidates is increasing with each successive day. He did not suggest which of the four short-listed candidates might have the inside track as the selection process draws to a conclusion. Sharif said that it will be difficult to choose between the candidates as each one has his own group of supporters. He said that he needs time to make his decision, but indicated that he is determined to move quickly.

¶5. (U) Biographical information for Abdulkareem Jama: Jama is an Amcit who is has been employed in various capacities by the Congressional Quarterly Press in Washington, D.C., since 2003. He has been active in Somali affairs in the U.S., and currently serves as a member of the Board of Directors of the Washington Islamic Academy, the Dar Al-Hijrah Islamic Center, and the Communities of Faith United for Housing. Jama was Chairman of the Board of the Somali Rescue Agency (1997 - 2001) and President of the Somali-American Peace Council (2007 - 2008).  
SWAN

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